

# Technology & Information

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## Epocrates Introduces Part D Formulary Software

To help physicians and pharmacists work through the implementation of the new Medicare Part D drug benefit with their patients, California-based Epocrates, Inc. is making Part D formulary information available to its network of nearly 500,000 health care professionals. All Medicare Part D drug plan formularies will be available on Epocrates free of charge, along with premium mobile and e-based clinical solutions.

The introduction of Medicare Part D, which has doubled the number of plans that physicians and pharmacists need to be familiar with, has raised concerns about how health care professionals will be able to handle the

additional responsibilities while maintaining their current level of patient care and service. A recent survey conducted by Epocrates showed that nearly 60% of physicians estimate that time spent on administrative tasks will increase by 20%, while nearly 70% of pharmacists anticipate that callbacks to physicians will increase by 20% (see Table 1 for other key survey findings).

With the Epocrates formulary tool, a clinician can:

- quickly check if a drug is covered by a particular health plan, such as Humana and Aetna;
- identify prior authorization requirements and co-pay levels; and
- search for generic and lower cost alternatives.

These features enable physicians to have real-time discussions with patients about treatment options prior to prescribing a medication. In addition, physicians can consult the formulary guide to determine if coverage is denied or patients have questions regarding their drug plan. The Epocrates software is expected to save physicians  $\geq 1$  hour of time each week and pharmacists  $\geq 2$  hours. For more information about this software, see the Epocrates Web site at [www.epocrates.com](http://www.epocrates.com).

**Table 1.**

### Key Findings of Epocrates Medicare Part D Survey\*

- The primary concerns of pharmacists and physicians are their inability to address questions from patients about drug coverage and additional administrative burdens.
- Nearly 90% of pharmacists have heard concerns from their elderly patients about the new Medicare prescription drug program, compared to about 50% of physicians surveyed.
- >70% of physicians and nearly 60% of pharmacists believe that the new drug benefit will increase the quality of care for seniors.
- 85% of physicians and pharmacists believe that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and health plans are most responsible for disseminating information about the new prescription drug plan.
- >50% of physicians rate their knowledge of the Medicare Part D program as "fair" or "poor."

\*Respondents included 604 randomly selected physicians and pharmacists nationwide who are part of the Epocrates Honors® Panel, a health care professional market research panel.

## CMS Upgrades Web Site

The new and improved CMS Web site became available on December 15, 2005, and is reorganized to make it easier to browse by audience or topic:

- The new "Fee-for-Service Provider Center" links on the home page navigation bar provide 1-stop-shopping areas targeted to specific professional audience needs. The center includes links to pages developed specifically for physicians, hospitals, and other Medicare providers and suppliers. The center's pages also are available using the "Browse by Audience" feature.
- The topic pages are organized under 8 major subject areas, which then are divided into categories and sections. All section links have overview pages designed to provide

general information about the specific section. The topic pages are available from the home page or using the “Browse by Subject” feature.

- The upgraded Web site also introduces an improved Google search feature, which will make it easier to locate information.

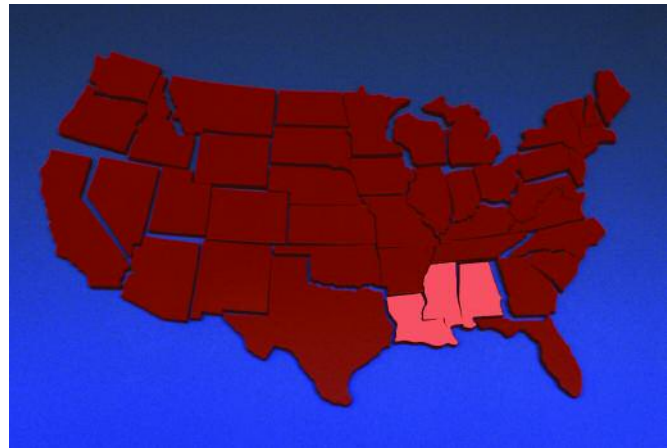
Users who key in outdated URLs will be redirected automatically to the new Web pages. See [www.coms.hhs.gov/cms](http://www.coms.hhs.gov/cms).

## Company Offers Free Software to Katrina Physicians

South Carolina-based Companion Technologies is offering free or reduced-price practice management and electronic health record (EHR) software to physicians in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi who qualify for federal assistance due to the recent hurricanes. Free software is available to small practices, while medium and large offices can receive up to a 75% discount. The offer is good until March 31, 2006, and can be obtained by calling 800-999-0788, ext. 1173. Eligible offices also will receive any needed hardware or third-party software at cost, with software maintenance discounts for 1 year.

To receive the free or discounted software, practices must be located in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-designated Katrina disaster assistance counties as follows:

- **Alabama:** Baldwin, Marengo, Mobile, Pickens, Greene, Hale, Tuscaloosa, and Washington counties.
- **Louisiana:** The parishes of Acadia, Ascension, Assumption, Calcasieu, Cameron, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberia, Iberville, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, Lafourche, Livingston, Orleans, Pointe Coupee, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Charles, St. Helena, St. James, St. John, St. Martin, St. Mary, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, Terrebonne, Vermilion, Washington, West Baton Rouge, and West Feliciana.
- **Mississippi:** Adams, Amite, Attala, Choctaw, Claiborne, Clarke, Copiah, Covington,



Forrest, Franklin, George, Greene, Hancock, Harrison, Hinds, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Jones, Kemper, Lamar, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Leake, Lincoln, Lowndes, Madison, Marion, Neshoba, Newton, Noxubee, Okitbbeha, Pearl River, Perry, Pike, Rankin, Scott, Simpson, Smith, Stone, Walthall, Warren, Wayne, Wilkinson, Winston, and Yazoo counties.

For more information about this program or Companion Technologies and the company's products, see [www.companiontechnologies.com](http://www.companiontechnologies.com).

## CMS Offers New EHR Software

CMS has released a new version of VistA-Office Electronic Health Record (VistA-Office EHR), an adaptation of the Veterans Health Administration EHR software technology. This version of the technology will allow for an evaluation of VistA-Office EHR and an assessment of its effectiveness in private physicians' offices.

The evaluation version will be distributed by qualified vendors and evaluated for usability, effectiveness, implementation, and potential for what is known as interoperability, or the ability to communicate, exchange, and use data with other systems and software. As a result of this evaluation, software vendors will be able to further improve the software and develop a version of VistA-Office EHR technology that is certified in accordance with

a process recognized by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

“The President has set a national goal for most Americans to have an electronic health record within a decade, and CMS is working with providers to make that happen,” said CMS Administrator Mark B. McClellan, MD, PhD. “The release of an evaluation version of VistA-Office will provide a testing laboratory for interoperability and will supplement efforts by the American Health Information Community to establish a certification process and criteria. When fully realized, electronic health record software will help physicians improve health care quality while avoiding unnecessary costs.”

A certification process will identify standards and minimum requirements to allow EHR systems to share important data across settings of care and perform the most important functions of an EHR system while maintaining privacy and security of data. Certified EHRs can enable the reporting of quality measures to support CMS quality improvement goals. In addition, these systems will help achieve the national goal of widespread adoption of interoperable EHRs within 10 years.

The release of the new software also will allow for the evaluation of VistA-Office EHR in physician offices, with particular attention to whether and how physician offices can implement the software effectively.

The modified VistA-Office software retains existing functions of such transactions as order entry, documentation templates, and clinical reminders. However, it has been enhanced with other important functions, including physician office patient registration, reporting of quality measures, and printing/faxing of medication prescriptions.

The VistA-Office EHR evaluation software is not free. There is a small fee for obtaining the software on a computer disk, and there will be other fees an office will need to pay to use the software, including licensing and support fees for the database program and CPT® codes. In addition, the added office staff cost associated with the implementation of an EHR system will be a part of the total cost of ownership and will play a part in physicians’ deci-

sions to adopt and test the VistA-Office EHR.

Finally, offices will generally need vendor support for installation, configuration, and maintenance, similar to support needed with any EHR software. To address this need, CMS has funded a VistA-Office Vendor Support Organization, WorldVistA, to provide training for vendors. The evaluation of these vendor services is an important objective of the initial VistA-Office EHR release.

Physicians and clinics that are interested in participating in the program as an evaluation site should visit [www.VistA-office.org](http://www.VistA-office.org) to learn more about this opportunity. More information about vendor training and a list of qualified vendors can be found at [www.worldvista.org](http://www.worldvista.org). Additional information is available at CMS Web site: [www.cms.hhs.gov/quality/pfqi.asp](http://www.cms.hhs.gov/quality/pfqi.asp).

## Web Site Lists and Rates Free Software

A list of free medical software programs for handheld applications can be viewed at [www.collectivemed.com/tshtml/Free\\_Software/](http://www.collectivemed.com/tshtml/Free_Software/). The list includes user ratings and a brief description of the various programs. Among the software listed are those that provide cardiology clinical guidelines, a medical calculator, an arterial blood gas analysis program, and a body weight/body mass index calculator.

## Free Software Tools Available

Several free software tools are available at [www.statcoder.com/company\\_info.htm](http://www.statcoder.com/company_info.htm)

- STAT Cholesterol™ takes the complex new Adult Treatment Panel III lipid management guidelines and makes them easy for clinicians to implement.
- STAT Cardiac Clearance™ allows users to implement 2 standard “cardiac clearance” algorithms in a stepwise fashion for patients undergoing noncardiac surgery. **MPM**

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Joanne Kaldy is the Managing Editor of *Assisted Living Consult* and a regular contributor to *Medicare Patient Management*.